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WAR AND THE CHILDREN



Cavalier of the Gay Collection
(XIV Century)

THE great business of children is to imitate their elders. Little girls play at being grown-up, at being Mamma, or the school teacher. The boys play at war and at hunting, in old times they played at tournament, or tilting at the ring. Prisoners Base is an imitation of battle, with its prisoners. In war-time the child thinks only of sabers and cannon: it is that time now, and as did Charlet after the wars of the Empire, Poulbot draws with spirit the martial scenes of our lads.

In all times the child has been attracted by the imitation of war which he carries out in two ways. He is a soldier; he arms himself, buckles on his belt, from which hangs his wooden sword, puts on a cocked hat of paper, and sets forth bravely to the assault.

Or perhaps he heads an army of which the soldiers are of wood, of pewter or of lead, he draws them up before a cardboard fort, and fires against them bullets which are little peas and which sow death among the ranks of the small colored figures. In imagination he raises these little warriors to his own stature, or reduces himself to theirs; it is always

one or the other, he is their generalissimo, or better still he is the Providence which rules the fortunes of war.

We do not see any more the good old wooden soldier of our infancy: he was pleasant, flourishing in his pine and rosin and varnished color, he wore the uniform of the veterans of the Crimea, and his legs without feet rested side by side on a round as yellow as the sands of Nubia, or on one of the halves of a hinged losenge which made him go and come like a fly on a pair of scissors.

Wood in the children's army as in the architecture of the grown-ups has given place to metal, and the soldiers are made of lead mixed with pewter, flat or rounded, hollow or solid.

The lead soldier is of noble and ancient origin: he existed in the time of the Romans. Excavations at Rossège and at Pesaro have brought to light two knights in metal which came from boxes of soldiers. The middle ages knew these figures in pewter, warriors or war-like saints which were sold in the shops before the churches for pilgrims. There is preserved a "Saint Michael" of pewter, and a "Flight into Egypt" of the four-

teenth century. The Myers collection, according to the catalogue of Brussels (1877), possessed an interesting leaden cavalier of 1270. It is a most curious piece. The feet of the horse rest on two little squares which enable it to stand upright. The knight wears the uniform of the thirteenth century, helmet, coat of mail, pointed shield bearing a cross; the horse is caparisoned; the action of its gallop has vivacity. A broad sword hangs from a leather shoulder-belt. The head, the back of the neck, the throat are protected by a mantle of mail. The subject is treated with an art at once ideal and realistic, in the right proportions, and with most exact detail. This piece is very beautiful, and shows us the care taken by the parents of the thirteenth century to cultivate a martial enthusiasm in their boys, by giving them for playthings faithful images of battles and tournaments.

Henry of Germany, who has devoted to this subject thorough study, is right to compare the Meyers cavalier with the cavalier of the Galy collection (fourteenth century), reproduced in the *Glossaire archéologique*. The horse is not caparisoned, but the harness is drawn in beaded lines which look like rich gold cord; the horse's head is surmounted by a bunch of plumes. The feet of the beast are soldered to two four-scalloped rounds, to make him stand. The saddle is heavily embroidered. The warrior is covered with iron, casque, cuirass, coat of mail, arm and leg covers of iron, shoes of steel, large spurs, belt set with large precious stones. A long sword hangs at his side. One arm holds the lance, the other is covered by the pointed shield adorned with the cross. The precision of all the details makes it appear that this most rare piece was once painted, decorated with bright colors, and touched-up with gold and silver.

These two knights belonged to the industry which appears to have flourished during the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries, of tournament plays for children. The makers designed pretty types of knights fighting, on horses richly caparisoned, like the champion clad in iron and mounted in a little chariot, which dates from the sixteenth century, and for which 47,500 francs were paid in 1895, a price which sufficiently indicates its rarity.

The play of arms consisted in a grooved board along which the two mounted combatants could go and come drawn by a string; several old prints show this. Some years ago the model was reproduced and figured as a novelty. It was not altogether new.

Recently the Russian sculptor Bartram has created a type called the Knights of the Tourney, which has been made by the peasants of the little rural industry called the Koustaris.

One of the most curious lead soldiers was found in the Seine in Paris, while dredging the river. It is a little figure ten centimetres high, and weighs fifty grammes. It represents a musketeer with the casque and doublet of the infantry. He wears a belt of cartridges, and a little powder horn. The arquebus has disappeared, but a hole pierced vertically through the hand shows the manner in which the soldier held it. The uniform, the cut of the beard, and of the moustache give us the date of this plaything which was made at the end of the sixteenth century. It was run in a mould, and is solid. This curious figure is in Strasbourg, at a Lorraine collector's.

The Germans have put forth their best endeavors in the lead-soldier industry of which they are among the first makers. J. G. Hilpert who died in 1794, has left an interesting catalogue of his models,

among which figured military types of all the great powers of Europe. His successors have perfected his work, ordering their models from the greatest artists, and seeking their subjects in history and in archaeology. They have made a *Trojan War* which is excellent. All the great wars, all the great battles have their box, with maps, plans, explanatory notes which, inspired by Kultur, teach that there is but one soldier and one people in the world, the German soldier, the German people. However absurd such a pretension may be, one must admit that it is a powerful method of patriotic education for the children.

In all times little cannon have been made for children, and a curious lilliputian army museum could be made with all the pieces that are in public and private collections, from the time of the mortars and bombs up to the most modern types. Many of these engines are very small, beautifully made and imitated.

One of the most celebrated is a little marvel, a cannon of gilded brass of the end of the sixteenth century, very finely engraved. At the back of the carriage is a receptacle to serve as a cartridge box. It is a beautiful and valuable gem.

Louis XIII as a child played with boxes of silver soldiers of which the journal of Héroard has preserved the memory and the price; he also tells us how the young dauphin walked in the garden dragging a silver cannon by a garter tied to the back of his belt. Louis XIV was trained for a military career by means of numerous and gorgeous playthings which were given him, among others, an army of lead soldiers modelled by Chassel of Nancy, and executed by Merlin, soldiers, horses, cannon; it cost 250,000 francs.

It was for him—he was twelve years old—that a little fort was constructed in

the garden of the Palais Royal, with its bastions, ramparts, connecting walls, escarpes, counterscarps, redans, slopes, crescents, embrasures, and redouts. This miniature fort was large enough to ride about on horseback.

The Bernard Franck collection contains a beautiful mechanical horse which belonged to the Prince Imperial, son of Napoleon III. The prince, after having amused himself for a time, gave it to a seamstress who was working for his mother, to give to her little boy. The noble charger remains in this humble family. It is a well-made plaything. The wheels are iron-bound. The harness is mounted with an "N" surmounted by a crown. The horse is of wood covered with skin, the trappings are of leather and velvet with gold fringe. The frame work of the whole is solid and at the same time light. Horses are rare in collections, because formerly the horse was neither mechanical nor entire: it was a cardboard head mounted upon a stick which the child bestrode. Old heads are very rare.

The entire history of France could be told by these war-like playthings, by museum pieces, and the contents of certain glass cases, by old prints, or by collections of lead soldiers, of which some are famous (those of Dr. Laumonier, François Carnot, etc.), or even by chessmen which were often warriors (the chess-board of Jules Claretie).

All the great wars have left their trace in the annals of childhood by the fabrication of martial playthings, and in "*La Famille Benoiton*." Sardou was right in stating that little soldiers often make the great soldiers of the future. This is still one of the phases of the educational rôle of playthings.

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From *Pandora*, Paris.
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